

Message Text

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ORIGIN EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

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DRAFTED BY EUR/SOV:WDYESS/AJ

APPROVED BY EUR -- JAARMITAGE

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P R 182124Z SEP 74

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY OSLO

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 205626

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, US

SUBJECT: PROTEST ON ROUGHING UP OF U.S. CORRESPONDENTS

REF: MOSCOW 14016

1. DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARMITAGE CALLED IN SOVIET
EMBASSY MINISTER-COUNSELOR VORONTSOV SEPTEMBER 17 TO MAKE
ORAL PROTEST ON THE MISTREATMENT OF AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS
AT THE ABORTED MOSCOW ART SHOW.

2. ARMITAGE SUPPORTED AND FOLLOWED THE GENERAL LINE OF
THE CHARGE'S PRESENTATION TO THE MFA (REFTEL) IN ASKING
FOR A FULL EXPLANATION OF THE FAILURE OF THE MILITIA ON
THE SCENE TO PROTECT THE U.S. NEWSMEN, WHO WERE COVERING
WHAT WAS BEYOND QUESTION A LEGITIMATE NEWS STORY.

3. VORONTSOV SAID HE KNEW ABOUT THE INCIDENT ONLY WHAT
HE HAD READ IN THE PRESS -- COMMENT: PROMINENT FRONT PAGE
COVERAGE IN THE NEW YORK TIMES AND WASHINGTON POST -- BUT
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SUSPECTED THAT ONCE AGAIN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS WERE

CREATING A NEWS STORY WHERE NONE REALLY EXISTED. VORONTSOV ADVISED AMERICANS IN THE USSR INTERESTED IN ART TO SEE IT IN MUSEUMS WHERE IT BELONGED.

4. ARMITAGE POINTED OUT THAT SEVERAL OF THE ARTISTS WERE INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN, THEIR WORKS HANGING IN MAJOR GALLERIES. THE JOURNALISTS HAD NOT GONE TO THE FIELD TO COVER THE VIOLENCE, BUT THE SHOW ITSELF, WHICH WAS LEGITIMATE NEWS. THE VIOLENCE BECAME AN EVEN BIGGER NEWS STORY. ARMITAGE SAID EPISODE NOT CONTRIVED BY JOURNALISTS AS VORONTSOV SUGGESTED, NOTING THAT SOME 400 PEOPLE HAD ATTENDED. WE WERE GENUINELY PUZZLED, ARMITAGE CONTINUED, BY THE WAY IN WHICH THE AFFAIR WAS HANDLED, PARTICULARLY THE INACTIVITY OF THE MILITIA PRESENT, WHO MUST HAVE KNOWN THEIR PROFESSIONAL DUTIES BUT DID NOT FULFILL THEM. IT SEEMED ALMOST AS IF THE OCCURRENCE WAS SOMEHOW MANAGED, THOUGH WHAT WOULD BE SOURCE OF ITS DIRECTION WAS UNCLEAR.

5. VORONTSOV HASTENED TO DISPUTE ANY INFERENCE INCIDENT HAD BEEN STAGED. HE THEN SAID -- WITH AN IMPLICATION HE WAS GIVING ADVICE -- THE SOVIET EMBASSY HAD INSTRUCTED ITS PERSONNEL AND SOVIET CORRESPONDENTS TO STAY FAR AWAY FROM THE SCENE OF ANY POTENTIAL INCIDENT IN THE U.S. AND TO WATCH DEVELOPMENTS ON T.V.

6. ARMITAGE SAID U.S. JOURNALISTS MIGHT HAVE DIFFERENT APPROACH TO NEWS COVERAGE AND NOTED WE HAD FACILITATED SOVIET PRESS COVERAGE OF EVENTS IN THIS COUNTRY WHICH WERE DOMESTIC AND SENSITIVE; E.G., WE GAVE CLOSED AREA TRAVEL EXCEPTIONS SO THAT SOVIET CORRESPONDENTS COULD COVER THE WOUNDED KNEE TRIALS.

7. EXCHANGE CONCLUDED WITH VORONTSOV'S APPROACHING BUT NOT ACTUALLY EXPRESSING REGRET OVER THE AFFAIR, AND HIS REITERATING HE WOULD LOOK INTO IT. ARMITAGE SAID WE EXPECTED STEPS TO BE TAKEN TO PREVENT RECURRENCE AND TO SEE THAT POLICE WERE CLEARLY INFORMED OF RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT NEWSMEN.

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